

Downside Up by Lady Viola Delesseps

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Summary: Jim Hopper never asked for this, never asked to be a small town kid who had a crush on a city girl, who married her and had a perfect life with a beautiful daughter that the doctors couldn't save. Who came back to just to be faced with another lonely heart like his who needed saving, a heart he sunk even further when things begin to happen and he realizes - he can't save anyone.

1. Hawkins, 1953

He wasn't about to wait for Bob Newby, Bob who still had the Mobo safety wheels on his bike, but something about the shout of his athletically-challenged friend halted him in his steps, and he let out a very tolerant huff and jammed the tails of his brightly-colored shirt deeper into the waist of his shorts.

"Hurry up!" Jim bellowed, "Or I'm gonna beat you to the social and eat all the drop cookies!" A smirk made its way over his face; if there was any way to bring his slowpoke friend up to speed, it was mention of cookies. He omitted to mention that it was his mom who was bringing the cookies, and as such he'd consumed more than his share of the dough while Bob got dressed and didn't have much appetite for them anymore, but as predicted, screen door banged and Bob came dashing out, hair askew, socks around his ankles.

Jim scowled. "Your mom's gonna know we went swimming."

"Not if you don't tell her."

"You look like you just came out of a tornado, pull your socks up. And tie your shoes."

"You're the one with a wet head," Bob retorted, and Jim scrubbed a hand through unruly blond locks with a defensive squint.

"The wind will dry it. It won't do much for yours, your bike's not fast enough!"

"Eat my dust, Jim Hopper!"

The two took off down the grassy driveway with as much speed as their eleven-year-old-legs could pump from their bicycles, and the twisting streets took them circuitously to their destination where the mothers, sisters, and wives of Hawkins, Indiana bustled about to set up the most glorious picnic of the blistering summer of '53.

"Bob! Jim!" a voice called, and the boys slowed, pedals hitting the back of Jim's legs as he turned to see his mother hurrying over,

drying her hands on her apron, a scowl etched between carefully shaped brows. "I told you boys to be here half an hour ago."

"Very sorry, Mrs. Hopper, we got distracted. We were just..." Gulping, Bob trailed off, glancing over at his friend's still-wet hair.

"Susan's cat got out and we helped her to catch it. This is sweat," Jim volunteered, brushing at the dampness behind his ears. "We were being good neighbors."

"Susan's mother told me she has measles," Mrs. Hopper began pointedly, but Jim interrupted, "Exactly why we were being good neighbors. Nobody should be running around after a cat when they've got measles."

Mrs. Hopper's mouth opened as if she were about to follow that up with something much more pointed, when a feminine call came from across the yard and she shook her head at the boys instead, managing, "Help us find rocks to weight the tablecloths, I've got to help Eleanor with this pie."

"You got it, Mrs. Hopper!" Bob returned with great gusto, and the two pushed their bikes into the shade and began to hunt rocks, mumbling to one another under their breaths.

"At least your dad didn't see us," Jim murmured. "He'd have both our hides."

"My dad? I'm more scared of your mom," Bob returned with a shudder. "She terrifies me."

"Why?" Jim scowled. "She's just my mom. Your dad's the chief of police."

"My dad can whoop me and send me to bed without supper for sassing him. Your mom can withhold cookies if she decides my hair isn't right. You tell me which is worse."

"Got one." Jim held up a fist-sized rock triumphantly from where he'd prized it from the dirt beneath the tree. "C'mon, we gotta get the dust off."

"Is she here yet?" Bob whispered, ignoring his friend, craning his neck around to stare at the continuous stream of arrivals to the picnic. "I bet she's wearing that yellow dress with the big bow."

"Would you shut up," Jim complained. "I've heard about nothing but Chrissy Carpenter's yellow dress for three weeks now."

"She's a perfect angel and she's mine," Bob proclaimed, round face sober. "You are my wingman, and you are going to help me win her eternal love."

"I'll help you take those dumb safety wheels off your Mobo and then maybe she'll at least look at you," Jim retorted. "Girls are dumb, I don't get why you want her to like you. If you get a girlfriend then we can never go swimming or slingshot Susan's cat. Because girls ruin all the fun."

"She can play the piano," Bob sighed, and Jim snorted.

"So can Mrs. Reynolds."

"Ew, Mrs. Reynolds smells like mothballs. Even on Sundays."

"Exactly. All girls eventually grow up into someone like Mrs. Reynolds, or my mom. So if you want to listen to her play the same song on the piano all the time, go ahead, but I'm gonna -"

Just then, a polite beep announced the arrival of yet another family, this time by car, as a burgundy Riley RMA pulled its way slowly onto the lawn, several individuals already making their way over to greet them. Bob gulped.

"It's her. It's the Carpteners."

"Here we go," Jim jeered under his breath, and Bob elbowed him.

"My heart is in my throat! What do I do?"

"Help me finish these rocks, you goon," Jim grumbled. "We still have to find a bunch more. I've found the only good ones."

"She's in the yellow dress," Bob breathed, sounding a little faint as he

twisted around, Jim with his back still to the family as Mrs. Carpenter alighted, aided by Mr. Carpenter, and several ladies lent a hand to carry in the eatables, the fellows in their Ivy Leaguers leaning over to pull a few folding chairs from the boot.

"Yellow dress my ass," Jim began, smacking Bob on the back of the head, and in the act getting a glimpse of the lass in question, a young girl with golden hair tied in an enormous ribbon, her dress a gathered smock of pure sunlight, the bibbed collar tied with yet another huge bow. "Huh," was as eloquent as his comment went after that, and he returned to digging rocks. "Your dad won't let you have a girlfriend. He was frosted that one time that you even asked him if you could bring a girl back to the house to trade cracker jack."

"I gotta sit down," Bob announced, to which Jim retorted, "You're already sitting down, you big pansy. Are you gonna help me dig these rocks or not?"

Bob was spared answering owing to the extraordinary circumstance of a girlish voice piping in, "Whatcha doing, boys?"and Chrissy herself smiling down at the two from beneath the sunny crown of her hair, dimples seeming to be put on especial display for these two alone.

"F-finding... finding... some – uh-" Bob began, and Jim finished stoically, "Digging rocks for the tables because my mom said to."

"Your mother's so sweet," Chrissy responded without missing a beat, gathering up that bright yellow dress and seating herself in the dust next to the two, poking a stick carefully at the dirt with an interested expression. "Can I help? My mom said I had to keep out from underfoot until she and Mrs. Gillespie had cut all the pies. Then she said I could help serve."

Bob was sitting with his mouth agape, words stopped in his throat, cheeks growing redder and redder with each passing minute, but Jim, coolly ignoring him, returned, "Oh, you can help alright, you can dust off the ones we find. But be careful. Don't get too much on your fingers or it won't scrub off."

He surprised even himself with how cordial he sounded.

Conversation came easily after that, the little girl prattling about her lovebird, and how it could sing three songs, and that she was teaching it to sing with her when she played piano, and also about how school was going to start again and how she hoped she could be one of the junior cheerleaders for the ball team. Jim said next to nothing and yet watched her, every movement graceful, her words a lilting background sound in his head and suddenly decided that maybe girls weren't so bad, so long as you didn't have them butting in where they weren't wanted and trying to get you to stop slingshotting the cat. She certainly was something to look at, to watch her just... do things.

Bob still said nothing and finally excused himself to hurry across the yard, looking very much in danger of passing out. Jim rose at last, and offered Chrissy his hand.

"We should scrub up at the pump, we got enough rocks. I'll pump for you." Gathering the armload in his shirt, the two walked across the lawn and Jim deposited the heap on the nearest table, shouting, "Bob! Put these around, will ya?" and then turning to begin pumping the water for Chrissy. She scrubbed as prettily as she spoke, small, dainty motions, working the dirt from her fingertips and from tiny, almond shaped nails like it were some kind of special choreography, and Jim realized he was pumping with an entirely unnecessary vigor by the time she was finished, a light sheen of sweat having broken out across his brow.

"Well." He offered a lopsided smile, letting go of the pump handle with a clank, and to his surprise, the girl returned the smile. "Let's go find Bob," Jim suggested. "He's got the hots for you and I think had to go lay down."

"The - the what?" Chrissy's face was suddenly overcome with confusion. "Bob?"

"Yeah. He thinks you're peachy."

"Well... well that's nice of him," the girl stammered, a flush creeping up her cheeks. "He never said."

"He's got a real way with words when he tries," Jim continued,

shrugging, thumbs finding the waistband of his shorts. "Not me. I blurt out whatever's in my head."

"But I like that," Chrissy affirmed, candor in her blue eyes. "A boy who's honest."

"Honest? Pff." Jim snorted, chin tipping towards the sky. "I never said I was honest. I'm the best liar there is. But when I'm talking about how I feel, I tell the truth."

"And how do you feel?" the girl began, shyness edging her tone once again. "About... about me?"

"About you?" He contemplated for a long moment, before taking her hand and giving it a swift peck, like he'd seen in the movies. Chrissy Carpenter. Huh.

"You're not half bad," was all Jim said.

2. City Girl

"How is it? How is it, you pretty thing-" Words, panted, made their way from his mouth, heavy on wet, uneven breaths, interspersed with kisses to that delicate flesh crushed against him in the confines of his car, a banged up Oldsmobile his dad had given him, saying only, "Don't wreck it, and don't screw girls in it." And what had the 17-year-old Jim Hopper done except tear off the already sagging front fender on a parking block at the Sinclair station, and now, while he was assumed to be figuratively pantsing the debate team on the subject of the recent Cuban Revolution, he was quite literally pantsing the gorgeous Chrissy Carpenter in the back of his sky blue coupe.

"How is it?" she breathed, head thrown back, golden hair askew, sweater someplace in the floorboards, that flimsy little Spiegel bra leaving nothing to the imagination, eyes drooping as she met his gaze. The smirk that came over features spoke of nothing but memory. *"Not half bad."*

"You sly kitten," Jim growled, hands encompassing her waist, fingers nearly lacing together on her spine while his thumbs sunk deep into the flesh of her belly. "Is that the best you can do?"

"Maybe," she gasped, any further flirtation drowned out as he claimed her lips once again, tumbling them headlong across the backseat, one fair foot poking out of the rolled-down windows.

June of '59 may not be as hot as some had predicted, but it was warm inside the Oldsmobile even with the windows down, and current company did nothing to keep the young womanizer cool and collected. Chrissy knew, the whole school did – Jim Hopper was a player, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Bob Newby had been there the first time Jim screwed her, well – not right there, but he knew about it and was fine, having realized that his fortunes lay in the words of radios and choosing to set his sights on his studies. What a boring son of a gun. Bob had agreed to take Joyce Walker, who was scrawny, to prom that very night so that Jim could take Chrissy. Funny that they both knew each other weren't exclusive, and yet they were gonna dance like there was no tomorrow

at that high school prom. And probably find someone else, each to themselves, to make out with in the back of a car, just like this.

"You're gonna break my heart one day, Jim Hopper," Chrissy breathed, delightfully disheveled, sprawling in languid contentment across the seat beside him. "You probably are already planning how to do it."

"Sure," Jim agreed complacently, placing a lazy kiss behind her ear. "You gonna run off with that Ned Hemmings if he comes stag?"

"Not if he's wearing that hideous sweater he wore last year."

"Anne Wetherby said he's a good kisser."

"How would Anne know," Chrissy sniffed. "She's never been with a boy in her life."

"Gossip's gossip." Jim shrugged, fingers playing slowly up and down her arm, seeing the tiny freckles and fine hairs illuminated by the bright sunlight. "They talk about us."

"Let them talk." Chrissy sat up abruptly. "When I'm graduated here, I'm going to Indianapolis. I'm done with small town life. I want to see the world."

"That's not quite the world, doll," Jim drawled. "But it's close enough."

"I'm going to go to beauty school. Make lots of money and have all the men love me."

"One part'll happen, and the other won't."

"What do you know, Jim." Chrissy smiled, and kissed him. "Debate class is about over. We best get along."

That night at prom Chrissy did not run off with Ned Hemmings, and Jim did not shag someone else in the bushes behind the school; that scrawny Joyce Walker was a decent dancer, and Bob was just as bad as everyone always knew. No, Jim Hopper went home early that night at the behest of Susan Tubbs who had biked to prom late,

asking if there was any way they could have the lend of his family's car for the next day when they drove into Blackburn to pick up some of their family there visiting from the city.

"I thought she just didn't have a dress," Chrissy said as Jim bade her goodnight, and Jim only shrugged, wedging Susan's bike in the back of the Oldsmobile and winding his way home in a stifled and crabby mood.

"What time do you have to leave?" he asked in a begrudging tone, turning onto Dearborne and dimming his lights as another car passed – likely on the way to pick up another promgoer. "You all going to drive out early?"

"Whatever Mom wants," Susan returned pettishly, lacing her fingers together in her lap. "We really do appreciate it. Our car's going to be in the shop at least another few days, and they're only visiting for the weekend, but it would be such an inconvenience if we couldn't see them."

"Don't they have a car?" Jim complained. "How'd they get from Indianapolis to Blackburn?"

"Uncle Rich does, but he's staying in Blackburn for work. It's my aunt and cousin we're picking up, so they can come see me and Mother."

"Ah. Real important," Jim returned bitterly. "Well, Dad'll lend you the car, good thing there's no school tomorrow, or -"

"Thank you so much," Susan gushed, the car pulling into the grassy drive between their two houses. "We do appreciate it, we'll come over in the morning."

"Crack a' dawn, I expect. See ya," Jim sighed, and shut off the car to unwedge Susan's bicycle, head inside to inform his parents, and curse his existence from the darkness of his bed.

Dawn came much earlier than he would have liked, and the Tubbs ladies were on the porch as the first birds began tweeting, Mrs. Hopper letting them in and giving them a hot breakfast while Jim sulked in the bathroom and doused his face in cold water. The

ladylike chatter drifted up the stairs and already set his teeth on edge, just as he heard his mother calling, "Jim? Jim, dear, you'll be late getting to Blackburn by noon if you don't hurry."

"Trust me, I'm hurrying!" he called, burying his face in the towel and letting out a dog-like growl, before sucking in his breath and turning to shrug into his shirt and button it with haste. Why. Why couldn't he be whizzing about town today, enjoying a summer weekend and hearing about what all went on last night after he left. Why couldn't he hassle Bob about his dancing, pity Joyce about her hair, and compliment Chrissy on her shocking show of fidelity? But no. He would be stuck in the car with Mrs Tubbs and Susan, and sister-of-Mrs.-Tubbs and cousin-of-Susan. Rue the day.

Clattering down the stairs, Jim glanced to his dad's easy chair, the man all but hidden behind Saturday's newspaper, silently hoping for an appeal, but the man gave no indication of his awareness and so Jim doggedly led the way to the Oldsmobile, keys in hand, silently resenting the fact that not even a pancake had been saved for him on the counter.

Jim drove. Drove with a set face and his mind on nothingness, not Chrissy, not Bob, not even pancakes, following the interstate to Blackburn with the feminine chatter tuned entirely out, slowing only once they'd taken the appropriate exit to receive instructions from Mrs. Tubbs to the hotel where their family had put up for the previous night.

"I'll go in and fetch them," Susan began excitedly, yanking the backseat door open almost before they had stopped and Jim resisted the urge to roll his eyes, putting the vehicle in park and hearing Mrs. Tubb's voice suggest, "Jim, go with her and carry their bags?"

"Ma'am," he returned with dogged compliance, clambering out and following Susan up the stairs with an air of saintlike resignation, stomach rumbling at the thought of the sandwiches he saw his mom send, and hoping against hope that the aunt and cousin did not have a lot of baggage.

"Which room are Mrs. and Miss Lewis staying in?" Susan inquired primly of the clerk, who directed them to room 1211, just down the

hall on the right, and Jim followed, letting Susan rap, and then squeal and embrace each of the figures who answered the door.

"Diane!" she exclaimed, flinging herself at the younger of the two woman, wrapping her cousin in her arms and clinging there with the tenacity of a drowning cat. "It's been too long!"

"It has! Oh, I'm so excited to be seeing your quaint little town again." Pulling away, the cousin regarded Susan with an intelligent eye and a pleasing smile. "Dad really wishes that he could come, but they need him here for at least today, if not today and tomorrow."

"At least we get to have you," Susan gushed. "Our neighbor Jim drove us in since our car is in the shop, and he can carry your things as well."

"Oh, and this is Jim?" The young woman cocked her head, eyes looking the tall figure up and down. "Pleased to meet you, Jim. I'm Diane."

"Diane." Jim took her hand, the grip strong, confident, something he hadn't expected. "Jim Hopper. Can I get your bags?"

"Just these two," Diane indicated, turning and gesturing to two modestly-sized cases. "We travel fairly light, lucky for you."

"Yes indeed," Jim chuckled, eyes catching on hers with the sneaking suspicion that he had heard... sympathy in her voice? Perhaps she wasn't like her cousin much at all, perhaps she understood... "I'll just take these out, we best get going if we want any of those sandwiches before they spoil."

"Sandwiches? Ah, I'm starved," Diane admitted, taking Susan's hand and giving her hair one last swipe before the mirror, a thick mass of dark blonde waves that looked as if they might have curled once upon a time. "You are very kind."

"He really is," Susan parroted. "We've been friends since we were children."

"Yep, we've known each other for ages," Jim hastily amended, and thank the Lord, was that pity he caught on the tail end of Diane's

gaze?

"That's the one thing that I envy about Hawkins, that tight-knit community. It keeps me coming back, but still, a summer every few years is about all I could manage." She gave a light laugh. "Otherwise I think I'd go crazy in such a tiny place ."

And thus the seed was planted. The seed of wanderlust in Jim Hopper's heart, and the seed of interest in this no-nonsense city girl, Diane. The drive home sped by, and Jim found himself almost sorry as they pulled back into his driveway, taking his time toting the bags across the yard to the Tubbs home, depositing them in the guest room, shaking Mrs. Lewis' hand, and lingering before Diane.

"Nice to meet you," was all he said, and her grin again put him immediately at ease.

"We really do appreciate it," Diane returned. "Maybe there's a second reason now why I'd like to come back to Hawkins."